



Sermon Text: Psalm 96

Sermon Date: November 25, 2018

In Acts 24, after the sudden eruption of affliction that engulfed Paul in Jerusalem, we see him wait in custody for over two years while the governor refuses to grant his release. After walking through the text in three successive stages, Pastor Justin explained the two types of waiting this text reveals.

PAUL ACCUSED

The Jewish leaders bring along a high-powered attorney to present their case against Paul. After nauseatingly untrue flattery, their lawyer, Tertullus, brings three unsubstantiated charges against Paul. First, Paul is accused of being a trouble-maker who stirs up riots throughout the world. Second, Paul is labeled a heretic, the ringleader of a troubling sect. Third, Paul is called a desecrator who defiled the Temple. All of these charges are expertly crafted to play to Felix's suspicions and lead him to release Paul into the hands of the Jewish authorities.

PAUL'S DEFENSE

Standing alone before the combined might of Jerusalem and Rome, Paul dismantles the baseless accusations brought against him. With the quiet confidence of a man whose conscience is clean, he answers each charge with the truth. To the charge of being a trouble-maker, Paul stresses that he has only been 12 days since he arrived in Jerusalem and he was not found disputing with anyone. To the charge of heresy, Paul confesses that Christianity is not a sect but the long-anticipated fulfillment of Jewish hope. And to the charge of defiling the temple, Paul responds that he was properly purified and sincerely worshipping in the temple.

PAUL IN LIMBO

Even though there is not a shred of evidence against Paul, Felix refuses to acquit him. Instead, he delays his decision while hoping to receive a bribe. As a result, Paul is left in legal limbo for over two years. And when Felix is removed from his position, he purposefully leaves Paul in jail to curry favor with the Jews. During this lengthy season, Luke gives us examples of two types of waiting

PAUL: WAITING FOR THE LORD

Paul is pictured as waiting for the Lord. The promise of Acts 23:11—that Paul would make it to Rome—seems to shrink into oblivion on the horizon of the past while Paul waits in Caesarea. During this time, we see two important aspects of Paul's waiting. First, he waits actively, not idly. He continues to obey God's calling on his life as he shares the gospel with Felix. Second, he waits convictionally. He refuses to compromise by giving Felix a bribe.

FELIX: WAITING AGAINST THE LORD

In contrast to Paul, Felix waits against the Lord. Although Felix is accurately acquainted with Christianity, knows Paul is innocent, has heard the gospel, and felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he waits to respond to the gospel. He will speak to Paul again at a more convenient time. Many people follow Felix's poor example—they put off following Christ until doing so is convenient. And like Felix, a more convenient time never comes. Waiting results in hardened hearts, and as a result they never trust in Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. Pastor Justin talked about our tendency to wake up each morning "at verse 12," forgetting God's promised faithfulness in "verse 11." How can you train your heart to remember God's promises when new trials erupt or old trials endure?
3. Why is it dangerous to get in the habit of hearing God's Word without responding to it? How can you guard against this hardening practice?